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Summer 2012

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SFA Gardens News

Volume 7, Issue 3

Summer 2012

Notes from the Director

By Dave Creech

We're going to build a building! Let's shout it from the rooftops. For those of you who haven't heard, here's the July 17 SFA press release:

An architect and construction manager at risk for a planned conservation education facility located at Stephen F. Austin State University's Pineywoods Native Plant Center were selected Tuesday by the Board of Regents.

The board selected Sutton Mitchell Beebe & Babin Architects to design the facility and J.E. Kingham Construction Company to manage the project, which is being funded entirely through private donations totaling approximately \$1 million. The facility will be constructed at 2900 Raguet St.

In a separate action, the board approved naming the planned facility in honor of Tyler philanthropist Ina Brundrett, a member of both the SFA Gardens and Native Plant Center boards of advisers. The Ina Brundrett Conservation Education Building will be used to develop and present environmental education programs to schoolchildren and visitors from throughout East Texas, furthering the mission of the PNPC to educate the public about growing and conserving native plants.

According to Dr. David Creech, professor emeritus of agriculture and associate director of the SFA Gardens, the planned facility will include classroom, office and storage space, as well as much-needed restrooms.

"We have about 12,000 students participate in our environmental education programs each

year, and this new facility will help us connect more visitors to the natural world, even in undesirable weather," he said.

"We are also very excited that the facility will have an energy-efficient design that will meld into the existing forest and create a perfect setting for a conservation education center.

What the press release doesn't say is that getting to this point in time is a bit longer story. Like a decade of planning, promoting and thinking about it — millions of hours maybe and more meetings than I can count. **But here we are! No, it hasn't been easy but we've reached** our million dollar goal. With the first design meeting this week, I find myself having a hard time removing the smile from my face. It won't be long before the Ina Brundrett Conservation Education building is brimming over with environmental education programming for thousands of kids, students, local citizens and visitors to our city and university. With more

than 12,000 children and 5,000 adults currently enjoying our SFA Gardens sponsored programs, this is one of those unique developments where **you don't have to worry about the "let's build it and hope they will come" dilemma: they're** already here!

What a difference a year makes! Rains have returned and temperatures are moderate. This is nothing like 2010 or **2011. Apparently we've sent all** that climate gloom and doom from the past two years to our friends a bit north. The U.S. drought monitor indicates that this is the driest, hottest summer on record for the USA, but just not here! We can now focus on other things besides dragging hoses, turning on and off faucets and valves and fixing leaks. **So for right now, it's all** about weed control, pruning, mulching and just making the place shine.

Our special projects are thriving. We are finally finished

See Notes, p. 2



SFA Gardens student workers install plants in one of three new rain gar-

Notes, *cont.*

with the basics of the three rain gardens at the PNPC and the first plantings were made on July 24. With Dawn Stover leading the charge, we now have three planting themes. Hot (reds, oranges and yellows), cool (blues, lavenders and mauve), and **Axe 'em Jacks** (purple)! Drs. Matthew McBroom and Yanli Zhang and a big SFA Gardens crew made short work of the planting and now we can sit back and enjoy the show. The Acer skutchii project at the Science Research Center is turning from great to amazing, giving credit to decent rains plus a gallon of water for every tree every day and regular strolls down the rows to kill weeds. Some of our trees are more than 12 feet tall! When you think that we planted small one gallons way back at the beginning of 2011—the worst drought year in recent history — **well, it's amazing!**

The Baldcypress on LaNana planting continues to impress. We have a new research project, by undergraduate Spence Simmons, that will determine the impact of nitrogen source and rate on growth and leaf tissue nutrient content of one of our clones. Eric Golestani, another undergraduate, is working with our kiwi project near the Starr Avenue bridge, and we can report five fruit. Not a barn burner economic enterprise yet, and we have vine health issues that are frustrating, so the verdict is not in on this interesting project. The Sustainable Community Garden Education plots, located on the east side of the SFA soccer field, enjoyed its **first season and there's lots of activity** there. Over in the Gayla Mize Garden, our crew has been moving the collection to drip irrigation and getting our new beds mulched.

I enjoyed another China adventure (June 14 – **July 2**) and **just as I'm now over jetlag – I'm heading back for two weeks at the end of July.** This stint includes presenting a paper on drip irrigation at the China Blueberry Development Conference in Yichun, China, and Janet and I will be participating in all the pre- and post-conference tours, which includes travelling into the mountains near Yichun to harvest the wild blueberries of that northern-most province! Just to make you mad, I understand temperatures will be in the fifties and sixties at night!

Finally, Trey Anderson, our PNPC Research Associate, is moving on to greener pastures. He has a fine job **opportunity that he just can't pass up.** While we hate to see him go we wish him the very best in his new adventure! **Until next time, let's keep planting!**

The Narcissus are Nearing

By Greg Grant

This time of year find me perusing bulb catalogs before I go to bed each night; dreaming of the cool temperatures of February and the annual show of heirloom Narcissus I use for a narcotic cocoon.

In my book, spring arrives not with the calendar but with flowers. And perhaps no floral symbol epitomizes the impending arrival of an East Texas spring as does the blooming of our assorted Narcissus species. Being cool season perennials means these stalwart bulbs start growing with the first soaking rains of fall generally around October 1. And since they are summer-**dormant, now's a good time to dig,** divide and plant them.

The word narcissus is derived from the Greek word narke, meaning numbness or stupor. Some attribute the naming of the flower to its narcotic

fragrance while others debate that it is associated with the poisonous nature of the bulbs, a built in defense against nibbling rodents. Of course in classical mythology it was the young lad Narcissus who was so enamored with himself that he stared at his reflection in a pool of water until he eventually turned into his namesake flower.

Most Narcissus are natives of Southern France, Spain and the surrounding Mediterranean areas. This explains their love of our dry summers and wet winters. Without exception, the most common species found growing throughout Texas today were brought over from Europe by the early colonists and distributed westward by settlers from the East. Invariably, the naturalized types found growing with reckless abandon throughout the state are mostly wild species or natural hybrids.

The word naturalize is just a nice term for **“run amuck” or “go wild”.** There's no substituting for wild genetic vigor in **any plant.** As a matter of fact, it's difficult to find any old homestead in Texas **that doesn't have at least one of the**



Rosie stands guard over a clump of sweetsies

Narcissus, *cont.*

“big three:” jonquils, narcissus or daffodils still thriving on site. They’re generally the last things left, even after the antique roses and crapemyrtles have succumbed to disaster.

What’s the difference between jonquils, narcissus and daffodils you ask? **Botanically speaking, they’re all** different species of the genus *Narcissus*. To the informed gardener however the differences are quite distinct. With a little practice one can even distinguish them by foliage alone.

True jonquils (*Narcissus jonquilla*) have dark green, round, rush-like leaves and clusters of small, fragrant, early, yellow blossoms. Almost all yellow cluster-flowered *Narcissus* are lumped into this group including jonquil hybrids. Jonquils and their kin are most common in the acid soils of East Texas. Even more common than the species, which often spreads by seed, is the campernelle jonquil (*Narcissus x odorus*), a natural hybrid between the wild jonquil and **the wild daffodil. Normally sterile, it’s** a bigger plant with two to three large, fragrant, yellow jonquils above big jonquil foliage, which is slightly flattened and has a bluish gray cast. Also frequently found is the Texas star jonquil (*Narcissus x intermedius*), a natural hybrid between the wild jonquil and the wild narcissus. It has short, pale yellow flowers above very flattened, green jonquil foliage. It was painted by the great French botanical artist, Redoute, in the early 1800’s.

The common name narcissus usually refers to the early blooming, white, powerfully fragrant, cluster flowered

cultivars of *Narcissus tazetta*. This includes, but is not limited to, what we commonly call paperwhites (*Narcissus tazetta papyraceus*). Regularly blooming naturalized paperwhites are limited to areas near the coast or other protected microclimates due to their extremely early bloom time (often between Thanksgiving and Christmas).



Rows of campernelle jonquils lead to Greg’s rustic barn

Narcissus are common all along the gulf coast including alkaline areas. A bit further inland, *Narcissus tazetta italicus* is frequently encountered. It has slightly twisted creamy white flowers with a pale yellow cup. Like all narcissus, it blooms best during a mild winter. Throughout the rest of the state, the most common form encountered is *Narcissus tazetta* ‘Grand Primo.’ **Its widespread adaptability is due to the fact that it’s the latest blooming** narcissus, usually between mid February and early March. It has big bold clusters of powerfully sweet, creamy-white blossoms which make excellent cut flowers. All narcissus have wide, flattened, dark green foliage with the exception of paperwhites which are blue-gray.

The name daffodil is reserved for the large, normally yellow, single trumpet-flowered cultivars of *Narcissus pseudonarcissus*. Without a doubt, modern, large flowered daffodils are the most popular type of *Narcissus* planted today. Daffodils are most commonly found in the acid, well drained soils of northeast Texas. Alt-

hough big flowered daffodils are the most commonly planted, they happen to be the least adapted for naturalizing. The most common naturalized form found is the wild species known as the **Lent lily. It’s considerably** smaller and earlier than its modern cousins, with pale yellow petals around a gold cup. And like all daffodils it has thick, flattened, blue-gray **foliage. It’s also much tougher** than its larger, showier kin. It too can spread by

seed in acidic, sandy-loam soils.

Without exception, the best types of *Narcissus* for naturalizing are the heirloom early blooming species and hybrids. This early bloom (January through March) ensures that the foliage can mature before mowing begins or hot weather sets in which kills the **foliage prematurely. It’s extremely** critical for successful naturalization that the foliage be allowed to grow, mature, and ripen naturally. This means it should never be cut off or **tied in cute little knots. Each year’s** foliage stores up the food reserves for **the next year’s bloom.**

Instead of staring at the calendar waiting for spring to arrive, why not head outdoors and spring into action yourself?

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87 campers attended in 2012 e 56 returning campers B 33% of campers attended on scholarship



Pineywoods Camp by Elyce Rodewald

Pineywoods Camp offers outdoor adventures for children ages 4-15 during June and July in the forests of East Texas.

Pineywoods Camp has grown steadily over the past 11 years—from one week for one age group to four weeks for three different age groups. As campers arrive at the Pineywoods Native Plant Center or at the SFA Experimental Forest, traffic noise disappears and the “wilderness” takes over. Campers instead hear birds, wind in the pines, and the rustles on the forest floor. Unique ecosystems offer opportunities to study rare plant communities, water quality, and wildlife. The forests of East Texas make a deep and lasting impression on our campers. They return year after year to find their favorite tree or fern bed, to check on the creeks, or to find out what new adventure awaits.

Campers are diverse in their ages, experiences, backgrounds and abilities. They come from varied socioeconomic and family situations. They are curious, joyful, friendly, and ready

to explore. Over the past 11 years, 687 children have participated in day camp and each year 60 to 80% return. At Pineywoods Camp, it seems that there are no ordinary children—they run faster, jump higher, act happier, learn faster, tolerate the heat and leave their electronics behind. They are our future.

Curriculum is deliberately flexible and broad, but related to plant and animal communities in East Texas, outdoor skills, and inter-personal skills. We encourage exploration, questioning, and investigation through hands-on science activities. Leave No Trace principles are emphasized to protect the plant and animal life as well as water quality in our natural areas. Silliness and healthy doses of FUN are definitely on the agenda. We realize, too, that the staff learn as much from the campers as the campers learn from the staff.

An exceptional staff is critical to the success of Pineywoods Camp, and we have been fortunate to have dynamic leaders and teachers for eleven

years. Student workers from the Arthur Temple College of Forestry and Agriculture, as well as other colleges at SFA, provide enthusiastic energy as counselors. In return, they receive excellent training and experience for future employment. Community volunteers and resource professionals bring a wealth of information to the camp and provide campers a look at professions in the natural resource fields. The education coordinator and camp director bring 40+ years of experience and an excellent safety record to camp.

Support for the day camp comes in many forms. Campers pay a registration fee, and community volunteers serve as camp counselors and canoe instructors, take photographs, help with preparations, and donate supplies. Nacogdoches Junior Forum members donate food for snacks and SFA Gardens staff, SFA Gardens Advisory Board members and community members have provided scholarships for up to 40% of the campers.



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372 total volunteer hours donated A 150 pancakes cooked in the rain by volunteers John and Cheryl

hip T 4 campers participating in all 11 years C 658 snacks provided by Nacogdoches Junior Forum

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Favorite songs: We're on the Way to Wonder Woods, Froggie, Three Short-necked Buzzards, Flea, Tootie Tot, Buffalo Song

l Boyette D ZERO whining by Wilderness Adventure campers while tent camping in pouring rain!

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Plants are Sexy and You Know It!

By Dawn Stover

I've long wanted to give a talk or write an article on sexy plants. I think the seed of that idea was planted when I ran into a xMangave 'Macho Mocha' plant about to flower in our garden and quite literally exclaimed "man, that's sexy!" I had also recently received a mail order parcel full of really cool succulents that could only be described one way: sexy. And then I started thinking. What makes a plant sexy and which other plants would qualify for that category in my mind?

I suppose some people would tend towards the vulgar, choosing plants that resemble certain body parts or flowers with their own reproductive structures in suggestive postures. Some may think that bizarreness or rareness equals sexy. The botanist traveling to remote locations to find the last of a species, or the bloom of a titan arum making an appearance on CNN, a granny walking through a botanical garden with a big purse and hidden pair of snips – all suggest that plants have us in their spell.

In my opinion, a sexy plant is one that makes you stop and take a second look. A sexy plant is one that makes you catch your breath, one that satisfies you somewhere deep in your psyche. At the very least, it's a plant that makes an exclamation. Yes one could argue that we call those "focal points" in the landscape, but shouldn't that focal point really make a statement? Sometimes our exclamations are more like whispers or an afterthought: like we've forgotten bold horticulture. Our exclamations should be well-understood by the average person. Like a piece of art that speaks to the masses.

Granted, sexy plants aren't exclusively focal points and sometimes it's how you use the plant that makes a statement. Sometimes it's using an ordinary plant in such a way that it turns a

ho-hum plant into a real head-turner, or perfecting that couldn't-be-more perfect color combination. Turning something ordinary into the extraordinary is definitely sexy, like watching your husband do the dishes.



xMangave 'Macho Mocha'

Succulents are easy statement choices as their structure; form and coloration often suggest the exotic. I've already mentioned the xMangave, but my list also includes the whale's tongue agave, *Agave ovatifolia*, with its wide, silvery-blue leaves, *Manfreda undulata* 'Macho Mocha' with long, strappy, undulating leaves heavily freckled with purple spots, *Kalanchoe thyrsiflora* 'Flapjacks' with broad lime-green padded foliage that blushes with orange given some sun and *Yucca gloriosa* 'Tiny Star' with its amazingly symmetrical tuft of bright yellow and green sword-like foliage.

Tropicals are equally effective at making a statement. The giant upright elephant ear, *Alocasia macrorrhizos*,

nearly touch the sky with colossal stems and leaves of dark green. And the ginger world is so vast and exotic! *Curcuma* species or hidden ginger, especially the Sulee hybrids, are jaw-dropping gorgeous with flower cones reaching nine inches or longer! They are incredibly hardy given good winter drainage and can take a fair amount of sun. And don't even get me started on *Farugium*. Despite the glaring lack of an appropriate common name, *Farugium* are stars in the shade garden. The cultivar 'Gigantea' catapults this genus in the sexy category. Massive, super-glossy rounded leaves stand bravely on thick upright stalks.

Tender tropics shouldn't be overlooked even though most need to be overwintered indoors. I can still remember the day when a *Furcraea foetida* 'Mediopicta' - aka the giant false agave - stopped me dead in my tracks at the Dallas Arboretum. Here is this massive, mostly upright, agave-like plant with thick, creamy-white stripes down each leaf. At their field trials this past June, I met two more beauties to add to the sexy list: the variegated Chinese crinum, *Crinum asiaticum* 'Variegata' and *Alocasia x 'Stingray.'* The former is a crinum with massive variegated foliage that could swallow children as they walk by and the latter couldn't have a more appropriate name as the 12 inch wide are shaped exactly like a stingray. Perhaps these plants make my sexy list because they are so contrary to the native wonders in my region. If I lived in Central America or Thailand, would I lust for bluebonnets and beautyberry with equal fervor?

Even common landscape plants, native or not, can be sexy when used in the proper manner. Let's start with the most ordinary. At Bayou Bend Collections and Garden in Houston, Texas,

Volunteers Shine in Mize Gardens' Chores

By Barb Stump

I could have called this article **"Something Old, Something New,"** since I'm going to talk about jobs that need doing in an older (12 years old) garden and newer one (two years old). **In any case it's summertime, and we try to catch up with special chores in the gardens.**

In the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden and the deep shade offers a cooling respite from the heat. It's also the time that our hydrangea collection blooms with cooling colors—from the bright white and double inflorescences of the oak leaf hydrangea (*Hydrangea quercifolia* 'Snowflake') to the lovely pink-rose of *H. paniculata* 'Pink Diamond' and light blue of *H. macrophylla* 'Nikko Blue'. We love our hydrangea collection and have been proud to mention they are in "the best place for growing hydrangeas" because most of them were planted in the deep shade at the base of the front berm below our front line of purple spider azaleas. They thrived with the water that drained from our overhead irrigation. But now to conserve precious water, Duke has installed drip irrigation along the University Drive front of the garden, and they are not getting enough moisture. It must also be said that we planted the plants very close together and that as they matured, they were



Hydrangea macrophylla 'Nikko Blue'

even harder for the visitor to see and enjoy. We are thankful for their abundant growth, but we either had to yank out a bunch of azaleas to lay a new "trail" for visitors, or come up with another plan.

Dawn came up with it, and it's the kind of action that other public garden managers take to preserve important but overgrown collections. She asked Arboretum volunteers Sherrie Randall and Charles Bradberry to wade into the main line of hydrangeas and take four softwood cuttings from each living cultivar. While they were at it, they verified the names and noted ones without tags. In April 2000, we planted 116 cultivars; 12 years later it appears we have 95 identifiable specimens.

Sherrie and Charles collected and labeled four cuttings from each of these plants, which will grow on in the SFA Gardens propagation benches, through potting and nurturing, and eventually planting in more open spaces throughout the garden. This process has reminded me that the hydrangea collection is one that I had neglected in my "plant-labeling frenzies" in past

years. So, look for new plant labels and hydrangeas in new spots soon. Major thanks to Sherrie and Charles for wading into the overgrowth to take the cuttings that will save this collection and give it more prominence in more spacious locations.

Another team that is lighting up my world is Jimmy Rodriguez and Gerry Peacock. They've been helping me mark out 100-foot grids in our newest garden, the Gayla Mize Garden, so that we can begin to officially locate the trails, beds and plantings that are already there. Jimmy and Gerry have been super to help in these hot months, but we pace ourselves. This work will yield our first "sketch map" of trails and beds so that I can create a "visitor guide" and then a brochure to help visitors see where collections are. Like many businesses with "down time" seasons, we need to take inventory of the camellias, deciduous azaleas, hollies, red-buds and other unique woody species in this garden so we can order more to replace lost ones, or order more to complement them. And, just as with the hydrangeas, we need to finish the plant labeling Greg Grant and I started over last winter. Our dear donor friend, Ray Mize, is already asking me about giving tours to visitors next spring, so this grid-measuring and mapping will help me make sure that those tours are a lot more informative. I really appreciate the diligence of both teams so much.

Sexy Plants, *continued*

there are rustic brick stairs with a smooth cedar handrail making a bridge across a ravine. On all sides of the bridge is a sea of cast iron plant, regular ole *Aspidistra elatior*. It is one of my favorite garden vignettes from any of the public gardens I've ever visited using one of my least favorite garden plants! I think it's about not being afraid to go

big with the design. I saw another of my favorite designs a few years back at the Missouri Botanical Garden using common annuals. Turning a corner, I was spellbound with a silvery confection of *Dichondra argentea* 'Silver Falls,' white flowering *Angelonia angustifolia*, silvery *Plectranthus argentatus*, 'Silver Mound' *Artemisia* and 'Diamond Frost' *Euphor-*

bia. Ok, so it doesn't hurt that it was all set off by some pretty sexy silver palms, but it wouldn't have been the same without the combination of all of those elements.

I think all gardeners deserve a little va va voom in their landscapes. What's your passion?



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Come Grow With us!

Osmanthus fragrans - Colorful Leaf

By Dave Creech

Sweet olive is one of the ten traditional flowers in China, a revered and ancient tree long appreciated for its evergreen nature, form, and fragrant flowers. In my travels in China, I've seen many different "kinds" of sweet olives and I've concluded that nomenclature in China is difficult. There are more than a hundred varieties, described in part on their season(s) of bloom, bloom color and size, fragrance, tree form and leaf variations. In the mix of things, there are reports of "colorful" leaf forms with some sporting red to pink new growth. I've seen a contorted tree form in Suzhou, China. As for variegation,



Mr. Wang stands with his grafted sweet olives

I've never encountered one in China or USA gardens – they may exist but no one has felt free enough to tell me or show me, perhaps fearing I might come armed with snips. In June 2012, I visited a very small nursery near Chang Jie village, Ninghai county, Ningbo city in southeastern China. Knowing my interest in the species, my hosts made arrangements for me to visit Mr. Wang who is a carpenter by trade, and specialty nurseryman by side business. Mr. Wang wrestles very large and ancient trees from the mountains, brings them to his small patch of ground, cuts them back dramatically and then regrows them into a much-appreciated rough and tumble bonsai for special gardens, businesses and parks. There's a lot of that in China, and sweet olive is part of the effort. In this case, it didn't take me long to find about five small grafted sweet olives in the nursery. With a distinct creamy white leaf margin surrounding a light green center and new growth featuring a pinkish-mauve tone, I was quite taken. When I inquired about the "name" I learned it didn't have one but was referred to simply as "colorful leaf." Good

enough for me.

I learned that Mr. Wang must graft these onto older trees to get them to grow.

Small stub grafts are stuck in the early spring, wrapped thoroughly and the take was described as "OK."

However, when I asked why they are never rooted, Mr. Wang said they were "weak" on their own roots and need a big tree to push the top to good size. He will grow these into a big crown and retrieve a very high price for the ultimate specimen. Although it takes many years to produce a saleable specimen, we can look at this as a kind of Chinese retirement plan!



Osmanthus fragrans "colorful leaf"